

Forum: The Committee on the Rights of the Child
(CRC)

Issue: Protecting the rights and welfare of children in armed
conflicts and child soldiers

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Introduction

There is currently violent conflict taking place in 67 different countries around the world causing thousands of deaths every day, even more are injured or abused. Civilians are always the ones to suffer most in a conflict and of these civilians it is children who bear the worst of it. Children are the most vulnerable group in society so in a conflict, this vulnerability is amplified tenfold.

There are countless horrific crimes that children are subjected to including, killing, maiming, militant recruitment, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and denial of humanitarian access. One of the most pressing issues is children taking up militant roles be it forced, coerced, or of their own volition. These children are not always used as soldier but may take up many other assisting roles such as porters, lookouts, lookouts, or spies, girls are particularly vulnerable with many being forced to serve as sexual slaves. Moreover, suicide bombers has emerged as a new use for these child soldiers.

No matter the reason they joined or the role they played, the children are the victims and it is a priority that they be saved from the physically and psychologically devastating situation of war.

Definition of Key Terms

Child soldier

A person under the age of 18 being recruited or used by armed groups in any capacity.

Area of conflict

Undesignated areas in which there is violent fighting.

War zone

A designated combat zone where the military operations are coordinated and the rights of neutrals are not respected by the groups at war.

Humanitarian aid

Any assistance pertaining to the saving of human lives or to the alleviation of suffering.

Key Issues

Displacement

Around the world it is estimated that between 11.2 million and 13.7 million children have been internally displaced as a result of armed conflict. The forced displacement of a child uproots the children at a time when stability is needed most. Displacement often occurs as the families face security risks including the many physical dangers of war and so leave to seek safety. Also, many children abandon home to avoid forced recruitment, only to find that displacement exposes them to a greater risk of recruitment. Moreover, internally displaced children often lack access to education and health services.

Education

The lack of education is a vital right being taken away from children in areas of conflict. The schools are often shut down to; security concerns, lack of available teachers, or due to damage sustained by the school itself. This is a priority because a lack of education not only takes away a child's right to education but may also lead to poverty and destitution in the future because they cannot find jobs because they don't have the necessary skills that school provides. This issue is particularly serious in less economically developed countries as it is most people's only chance at escaping the cycle of poverty.

Furthermore, schools are often targets for armed groups opposed to certain types of education, including the curriculum, or the demographic of the students such as the opposition to girls receiving an education.

Humanitarian aid

In many conflict areas children are being denied the right to potentially lifesaving medical attention and food and water. It is estimated that around the world 80 million children are denied humanitarian assistance. This lack of aid may be due to; areas being inaccessible due to fighting, aid being denied access by armed groups, or certain practices being forbidden. Some armed groups are opposed to male medical professionals treating female patients thus delaying or even denying the girls the treatment they require. Another issue are the deliberate attack on humanitarian workers, done to prevent aid going to the opposition. The act of preventing humanitarian aid was denounced in the 4th Geneva conventions which defined the treatment of civilians in areas of conflict.

Reasons for child soldier recruitment

There are many fundamental issues that are a direct cause of child soldier recruitment.

Poverty

Poverty is the strongest motivator for 'voluntary' child recruitment, these children are often coerced into signing up through false promises of money, jobs, and security. For many in grinding poverty, this can appear to be a real opportunity to escape and build a new life for themselves, particularly after the conflict is over, they may believe that they will be rewarded for their service. Poverty is too often a motivator for unthinkable choices as these people have no other options, and so will jump at any opportunity to escape.

Force

Many children are forced into service for armed groups, they are abducted and then beaten into submission. These children are submitted to horrible torture, many being permanently maimed. Another tactic is psychological torture, with many being told their families are dead and they have nowhere else to go. These children are victims to horrible treatment and their only their only option is to obey so as to survive.

Recovery

One of the most challenging issues is assisting children who have escaped areas of conflict and need treatment for both physical and emotional damage which can so easily

happen. Although, many are able to receive medical attention, it is not always to the standard required, particularly if the child has been maimed and needs physiotherapy to fully recover. Moreover, children rarely receive counselling for the psychological damage incurred due to being exposed to conflict. This form of treatment is particularly necessary for children who worked as child soldiers.

Major Parties Involved

Syria

The Syrian civil war has had a catastrophic effect on the lives of Syrian children with millions having to flee the country and face perilous journeys to overcrowded refugee camps. More than 50,000 children have been killed in the Syrian war since it started in March 2011, with many being targeted through bombs and shells in their own neighbourhoods.

Libya

The fighting in Libya has resulted in an unknown number of civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure. A large quantity of unexploded munitions has been reported in the city of Misrata which has been held under siege for some time with little humanitarian access. These unexploded munitions have caused countless mutilations of children with many losing hands and feet, which are life changing injuries.

Democratic Republic of Congo

More than 5 million people have been killed in conflict in the last 20 years and despite the war having officially ended in 2003, it is still one of the most dangerous places for children. It's estimated there are 40,000 street children in DRC, due to widespread poverty, and family breakups, making children more vulnerable to exploitation or violence. There are still armed groups active in eastern Congo and are responsible for the killing and forced recruitment of children.

Pakistan

Thousands of children are still living in areas of dangerous conflict, trapped by poverty as families are unable to move to safety due to financial reasons. These children have very little access to sorely needed humanitarian aid, with many children not having regular nutritious food and medical attention. Furthermore thousands of girls across Pakistan are unable to receive an education due to death threats from the Taliban who prohibit girls going to school. Although the Pakistan war ended, it is still a dangerous place for children as there are armed groups prevalent throughout the country.

War Child

War Child is a non-governmental organisation founded in the UK in 1993 which provides assistance to children in areas experiencing conflict and the aftermath of conflict. It works with children, families, communities, legal services, and local authorities before, during and after armed conflicts to develop more child-focused attitudes and systems. Including psychological support, rescuing and reintegrating 'child soldiers', working with legal systems to improve justice for children, setting up child helplines and community-based child protection networks.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of Event
1949	Fourth Geneva Convention <i>defines humanitarian protections for civilians in a war zone</i>
30 th April 1997	Cape Town Principals <i>regarding the prevention of recruitment of children into the armed forces and demobilisation and social reintegration of child soldiers</i>
6 th February 2007	Paris Principles <i>on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict</i>
19 th September 2012	Resolution 2068 <i>regarding the adoption of sanctions against parties that persistently violated the rights of children in armed conflict</i>

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The UN has been heavily invested in the protection of children in conflicts for some time and there have been many initiatives attempting to protect the children including, the deployment of child protection advisers, monitoring and reporting, negotiating with armed groups, awareness and advocacy, and legal reform, with the strongest emphasis being placed on peacekeepers.

There has been a large initiative to use peacekeepers deployed in the areas of conflict to better work to protect children. This has been achieved with new training programs

which train the peace keepers how to prevent and report violations against children, how to interact with other child protection actors, and raise awareness about their own behaviour towards children.

Possible Solution

One of the best possible solutions to the issue is for the conflict to stop, greater peaceful negotiations are needed to end and prevent conflict from taking place all together thus saving millions of lives from the horrors of war.

However, for the 67 nations where conflict is currently taking place, there is a great need for peacekeepers trained in protecting the rights of children. This will not only protect children from violence, but ensure that crimes against children are reported for investigation and not ignored.

Furthermore, the guarantee of humanitarian aid is essential to protecting the rights and welfare of children. Medical attention, and safe and regular food and water are basic human rights and so should not be exempted from children in conflict who are the most vulnerable.

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